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Tracy Surfaces With Harry S. Truman Battle Group *Veteran Submariner Is First To Head Up A Surface Task Force In Three Decades*

By Robert A. Hamilton

Norfolk, Va. — With 29 years of submarine experience behind him, Rear Adm. Michael C. Tracy has had to adjust to looking out from the bridge instead of through a periscope, as he prepared for his first major deployment as commander of the Harry S. Truman Aircraft Carrier Strike Group.

But he said the change has not been as tough as it might have been, for a couple of reasons, including the fact that the whole Navy is undergoing a period of dramatic transformation, scrapping the old cycle of deployments with a schedule that is far more flexible, known as the fleet response plan.

Instead of spending six months deployed and 18 months in port training and preparing for the next scheduled deployment, ships are supposed to be ready to go again if needed as soon as possible after they return.

With that as a backdrop, having a submariner commanding a surface task force doesn't seem unusual by contrast, even though it has been at least 30 years since it last happened.

"While we have been in a period of significant change and transition, I think everyone right now has a mindset, is in a culture, to think innovatively," Tracy said. "We have the ability to interact, to bring everybody's thoughts, talents and ideas to bear to make the fleet response plan the best that it can be."

Tracy, a former commander of Submarine Group Two in Groton, who commanded the submarine USS Newport News, said it has also helped that the Navy assigns all its officers to a broad range of tasks to make sure they are adaptable.

His career has included tours as a personnel officer at the Bureau of Naval Personnel, managing the business of the Navy Region Northeast, and contemplating air and surface warfare issues in his work on the Sea Shield and Sea Strike concepts on the Navy Operations staff.

"By the time you get to this point in a career, you know how to take the best ideas from all sources, and bring them to bear on the mission," Tracy said. "All of that really served me very well. It was really a seamless transition."

He said the strike group staffs are also trained to provide the commander with the kind of information he or she needs to make the right decisions.

"You've got such talented people working for you, if you just let those people do their job, you're just providing some focus, some ideas and direction," Tracy said. "I think any naval officer with a broad-based career can do the same thing."

He said one thing he has learned in his first few months on the job, working with 7,000 men and women under his command, is that submariners don't have a monopoly on hard work.

"It has been inspiring to see these young people ... carry on their difficult, complex task on a daily basis," Tracy said in a telephone interview last week, the day before the Truman left on its deployment on Wednesday. "It's not platform unique. It is common to the men and women who wear the cloth of this nation."

Coincidentally, the Groton-based submarine USS Albuquerque, which is part of

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Submarine Group Two, deployed with the battle group.

Tracy assumed command of Cruiser-Destroyer Group Two and the Truman strike group in Norfolk last spring, becoming the first submariner to command a battle group since Adm. Harry Train from 1971-72.

Tracy was in command through the Truman's participation in Summer Pulse '04, which tested the fleet response plan by "surging" seven strike groups on short notice for extended operations over several weeks. Tracy operated with 30 ships and 350 aircraft from 10 different countries.

"That was a powerful demonstration of teamwork," Tracy said. Summer Pulse showed

"We're always ready, we're capable, we're flexible ... It was a very good experience for us, and in my mind validated our fleet response plan."

The Truman strike group is now preparing to depart on a full deployment, which could last six months or longer. Tracy said the interaction of the submarine, surface combat, aviation and Marine Corps communities in the Truman strike group has benefited everyone so far.

"We each bring a different ability to analyze and assess, and then make rapid improvements," Tracy said. "All those talents brought to bear have really improved our ability to increase readiness."

Iraq Commanders Warn That Delays In Civil Projects Undermine Military Mission

By Thom Shanker

WASHINGTON - American military commanders in Iraq are warning civilian leaders in Washington that delays in reconstruction projects caused by red tape are putting the lives of their troops at risk and undermining the military mission in Iraq.

From the junior officer level up through the senior ranks, these officers have outlined obstacles that they say frustrate the rebuilding just as much as the roadside bombs and terrorist attacks that are the more visible threats. They have argued to the new American Embassy in Baghdad and to Congressional delegations visiting Iraq that certain regulations are a dangerous impediment to the military's mission.

"Bureaucracy kills," said one senior commander.

"We went to the embassy. We talked to two Congressional delegations. We are asking for assistance," said another senior American military officer in Iraq. "We can either put Iraqis back to work, or we can leave them to shoot R.P.G.'s at us," a reference to rocket-propelled grenades.

In interviews and e-mail exchanges that are full of similar comments, a range of officers all across Iraq expressed the view that success at delivering electricity, water, sewer services and health care is just as important as killing enemy fighters. And they revealed deep frustrations with procurement regulations involving such matters as bonds required of local contractors and workers' compensation costs.

The problem, they say, is the system of peacetime regulations governing routine federal contracts that is being applied in the chaos facing the reconstruction efforts. In detailed reports to the Baghdad embassy and the Pentagon, the officers described how projects were delayed and halted because of requirements to offer substantial workers' compensation coverage to local laborers, or rules that required start-up Iraqi construction companies to post large bonds.

"It is hard to believe that we can possibly get but a small fraction of the \$1.23 billion of

projects slated to begin before 31 Dec. started on time," said another military officer in Iraq.

Last week, the American ambassador in Baghdad, John D. Negroponte, sent a cable to Washington pleading for flexibility. He proposed 20 federal acquisition regulations that could be waived for projects in Iraq, according to four administration and military officials who read the internal report.

At the same time, the National Security Council has organized an interagency task force to conduct a wholesale review of contracting problems in Iraq.

"We are looking at all of the federal acquisition regulations," said a senior administration official involved in the project. "Don't you think some of these could be modified, waived or otherwise altered to allow us to work in this wartime environment?"

The Pentagon, meanwhile, has arranged for a few immediate remedies to be inserted into the defense authorization bill now before Congress. One would streamline contracting procedures for projects in Iraq costing up to \$1 million, doubling the current ceiling of \$500,000 for the speedier procedures. The second would allow commanders to make purchases of up to \$25,000 without competitive bidding, up from the current limit of \$15,000.

"Unfortunately, we have many more elaborate regulations for how we spend money than for how we fire tank ammunition," said one senior Defense Department official. "And if we didn't, people would be up in arms that we're not careful with taxpayer money. If it was a simple problem, it would have been resolved a long time ago."

The contract regulations were designed to prevent waste and fraud, and they are staunchly defended by members of Congress already upset with abuses of sole-source contracts in Iraq. Commanders say those concerns mean there is little appetite among American contractors to push for change: Potential bidders do not want to be lumped in with Halliburton, which holds a multibillion-dollar, no-bid contract for services

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in Iraq and is under investigation on suspicion of overcharges.

The federal acquisition regulations cover the spending of billions of taxpayer dollars authorized by Congress for reconstruction and security in Iraq. Rather than struggle to slice through the rules, American officers often tap small discretionary funds - mad money, in military slang - under the Commander's Emergency Response Program.

Those funds, \$180 million for Iraq and Afghanistan in 2004, are to grow to \$500 million in the new fiscal year in an increase pushed publicly by Paul D. Wolfowitz, the deputy defense secretary, who has met with senior officers in Iraq and supports expanding the availability of funds to be spent directly by commanders, in particular to train and equip Iraqi forces.

Representative Ellen O. Tauscher, a California Democrat who specializes in military affairs, spent a week touring Iraq last month and heard these contracting complaints raised by officers there. She said she was sympathetic to considering legislative actions to accelerate the reconstruction contracts, but also complained that the current debate did not ask why more was not done during the first year of the American occupation, when the Coalition Provisional Authority was in charge of rebuilding Iraq.

"Congress is always willing to look at amending, especially in emergency situations, the ability to contract and produce both real goods and services that need to be provided,

certainly when in the context of protecting American fighting men and women and getting the Iraqi security forces stood up," she said. "But really, this debate is all a smokescreen. The real question is what did the C.P.A. do for an entire year?"

Administration officials said that at least some of the regulations criticized by commanders and the Baghdad embassy can be resolved directly by contracting officers in the field, and they are urging those contracting officers to be more aggressive in answering the commanders' complaints.

But commanders say that even car-bombings are not considered by federal acquisition regulations to be excuses for project delays. Many potential bidders are not willing to do business on those terms.

Among other obstacles to accelerating Iraqi reconstruction, as described by the military and the Baghdad embassy in reports back to Washington, is a requirement for securing \$500,000 in workers' compensation insurance for projects in Iraq - even for jobs that employ Iraqis at just \$5 a day.

Administration officials are considering proposals to cap workers' compensation claims by Iraqis at \$10,000. To jump that hurdle, American commanders subcontract work to Iraqi companies because they operate under Iraqi workers' rules. The officers said that local rules do not yet exist or are unenforceable but theoretically would set limits on claims more in keeping with local salaries.

Anthrax Vaccinations Resume, Expand

Plan To Give Delayed Shots To 200,000 Called Safe

By Deborah Funk

Service members who started their anthrax vaccinations before the Pentagon ran out of supplies more than three years ago are receiving shots again, regardless of where they are assigned.

Some 200,000 troops fall under the plan that resumes shots for anyone who received at least one in the long series and is still in the military.

Anthrax vaccine is given in six shots at prescribed intervals over 18 months, according to its label, followed by annual booster shots.

But under the Pentagon's plan, service members are simply picking up the series where they left off. If they got their first shot three years ago, they will get the second now. If they were up to the fourth shot before, they'll pick up with the fifth shot now.

Army Col. John Grabenstein, deputy director of the Military Vaccine Agency, said the practice is based on advice from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, and from the Food and Drug Administration. Picking up where a shot series left off is seen in vaccines administered to children and health care workers.

"The delay doesn't reduce getting to the ultimate goal," Grabenstein said. "The delay causes a delay."

The body has memory cells that recall exposure, Grabenstein said. "This is a fundamental principle of immunology."

Dr. Henry Shinefield, co-director of the Kaiser Permanente Vaccine Study Center, agreed. He pointed to a Defense Department study published in the journal Vaccine that showed a body remembers receiving one to three shots of anthrax vaccine 18 to 24 months after they were administered. Shinefield said it could be presumed that the body's recall would continue for some time beyond the 24 months measured.

Several years ago, however, before supply shortages began narrowing the program's scope, federal officials warned defense officials against deviating from the approved schedule.

"This schedule is the only regimen shown to be effective in protecting humans against anthrax and is the only schedule approved by FDA," Kathryn Zoon wrote in a 1999 letter to then-Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs Dr. Sue Bailey. At the time, Zoon was director of the FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research.

In her letter, Zoon reiterated what the FDA had told defense officials two years earlier: "FDA approval

of the anthrax vaccine is based on the six-dose regimen found in the approved labeling. Because we are unaware of any data demonstrating that any deviation from the approved intervals of doses found in the approved labeling will provide protection from anthrax infection, we strongly recommend that the Anthrax Vaccine Immunization

Program follows the FDA-approved schedule."

Grabenstein said the letter was written before the vaccine shortage that interrupted the program and was aimed at ensuring troops, particularly reservists, received their shots on schedule, not just at the military's convenience.

Lenore Gelb, spokeswoman for the FDA, said there is no legal penalty for deviating from the schedule and that physicians can use drugs in ways not specified on the label based on individual patient needs. She said the FDA doesn't regulate physicians or the Defense Department.

"The bottom line is, the vaccine is shown to be safe and effective," Gelb said.

But Mark Zaid, an attorney representing current and former service members in a suit against the government alleging that the vaccine's use to protect humans against inhalation anthrax is illegal, said deviating from the schedule is not authorized by the vaccine's license.

Dr. Meryl Nass, a Maine physician and researcher, said that means military officials should be required to get "informed consent from those taking the vaccine."

Nass has testified before Congress on possible links between Gulf War illness and anthrax vaccine and is an outspoken critic of the military's anthrax inoculation program.

The Pentagon's vaccination program began in 1998 but was scaled back several times and virtually ground to a halt by summer 2001. It resumed in July 2002 for troops going for more than 15 days to designated high-threat areas.

Defense officials this summer announced an expansion of the program to Korea.

And in a July 28 memo, Dr. William Winkenwerder Jr., the Pentagon's top health official, made clear that service members who began the shot before the slowdowns would resume their vaccinations, whether they were in a high-threat area or not. Those troops are to resume their vaccinations by Dec. 31 unless they are exempted for medical or administrative reasons.

Missing Pilot's Fate Still A Mystery

Speicher's Plane Went Down In Iraq In First Gulf War

No clues to the fate of missing Navy pilot Capt. Michael Scott Speicher have surfaced since a U.S. search team left Iraq in May, a senior U.S. officer said Oct. 6.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Joseph J. McMenamin, military commander of the Iraq Survey Group, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that results of the effort in Iraq have been turned over to the Defense Intelligence Agency, which is writing a report on the 13-year Speicher case.

McMenamin did not detail his group's findings.

Other officials have said previously that no evidence was found to determine conclusively whether Speicher had ever been in captivity in Iraq.

Speicher, then a lieutenant commander, was shot down in an F/A-18 over central Iraq on Jan. 17, 1991, the opening night of the Persian Gulf War. His remains were never recovered. Since the incident, Speicher has been promoted to O-6.

The Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein maintained from the start that Speicher died when his plane was shot down.

"The Speicher team exhausted all in-country leads regarding the fate of Captain Speicher," McMenamin said. "No new leads have been developed since their departure." He added that the Pentagon would "immediately pursue any new leads or data generated in Iraq on the status of Captain Speicher." Later, however, under questioning by Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., McMenamin said some leads could not be pursued to an end because of the security threat posed by the Iraq insurgency.

"It's extremely difficult to get about in parts of the country right now to follow up on some of those leads," McMenamin said. He did not say whether this was why the search team left in May.

McMenamin said some items missing from Speicher's aircraft, including his identification badge and pistol, have yet to be found. Other items were discovered when the crash site was searched some years ago. Searchers went back to the site after the fall of Baghdad last year.

McMenamin indicated he believed there are people in Iraq who know where the missing items can be found.

"It involves tracking down people somewhere in the country. Some are afraid to come forward. They're there. It's just going to involve getting to them and finding them and finding out what the answers are," he said.

The Navy has changed its position on Speicher's status over the years. Hours after his plane went down, the Pentagon declared him killed in action. Ten years later, in January 2001, the Navy changed his status to "missing in action," citing an absence of evidence that he had died.

In October 2002 the Navy changed Speicher's status from missing in action to "missing-captured," although it has never said what evidence it has that he was held in captivity.

In announcing that decision, Navy Secretary Gordon England wrote at the time, "I have no evidence to conclude that Captain Speicher is dead."

U.S. Navy Makes Skirts Optional For Women

By Stephanie Stoughton, Associated Press

The U.S. Navy is getting a 21st century makeover, with a new dress code that makes skirts optional for its more than 54,000 female sailors for the first time since women officially entered the service in 1908.

Women can still choose to wear skirts, which come in colors that vary according to rank and sometimes the season. But until the new rules went into effect this month, they had to maintain skirts in their sea bags and could be ordered to wear them for special events such as change-of-command and retirement ceremonies.

The revamped skirt policy is one of several new changes to the dress code recommended after a survey of more than 40,000 sailors. As a result, all sailors in working uniform can now wear cell phones and carry garment bags over their shoulders. Women can also ditch their military purses - boxy and widely unpopular "granny bags" - and purchase more stylish replacements from department stores.

"They are really commonsense, practical changes that are in line with the Navy of the 21st century," said Lisa Mikoliczyk, a spokeswoman for Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Terry Scott.

When the results of the survey came in earlier this year, Navy officials discovered that, along with answering the 33 questions, the respondents had written more than 5,500 pages of comments on topics that weren't necessarily covered, said Master Chief Robert Carroll, director of the uniform task force.

Among women's leading complaints: That it made little sense to pack skirts in their sea bags and maintain them aboard ships because it wasn't practical to wear them.

They also noted that the skirts didn't compliment many women's shapes. "There was sensitivity regarding the abdomen area," Carroll said. "They gave an individual a pouch even if you didn't have one."

Furthermore, one of the skirts - a dress-blue one with a narrow cut - had no kick pleat. "You definitely couldn't break out into a full run," he said.

The Navy plans to add a kick pleat to that skirt and to redesign others to make them more flattering, Carroll said.

Other changes may be on the way for both men and women. The Navy is considering getting rid of its summer white and winter blue uniforms and going to a year-round service uniform for ranks E-6 and below. For all ranks, the Navy is experimenting with a multicolored battle dress uniform that would replace six or seven working uniforms.

The decision to make skirts optional has won raves.

"Just being able to say 'This is what I want to wear today.' ... That's a good thing," said Chief Petty Officer Tracey Jackson, a Navy career counselor in Norfolk.

Skirts won't vanish from the Navy, or from the other military branches. The Marine Corps and Air Force still require skirts for certain formal occasions. The Army said they're optional, but women must still maintain their military-issued skirts.

The Navy's new dress code also allows sailors to wear cell phones, personal digital assistants and pagers if they are on official business. But the devices can't be visible from the front and must be worn on a belt.

And Navy men and women in working uniform no longer have to hold gym bags, suitcases, backpacks and garment bags in their hands. Now, they can place the straps over their shoulders.

Women said they are especially pleased that they can use their own purses, as long as they fit the Navy's dimension and color requirements - and no visible brand logo is allowed.

The military purses - in brown, black and white - are so bulky and unattractive that some sailors wouldn't be caught dead with them after work. But switching belongings between a personal handbag and a military purse caused headaches.

"I'd always forget something," Jackson said. "Usually, my checkbook."

Defense Watch

The Latest Word On Trends And Developments In Aerospace And Defense

Can You Hear Me Now?

Keith Sanders, the Navy's deputy program executive officer for strike weapons, said last week the weapons community must be aware that a limiting factor for long-range weapons may be communications links. During a Precision Strike Association conference, Sanders praised the Tactical Tomahawk as the "first of the netcentric weapons," largely because it can be retasked in flight and loiter, if needed, until an opening to strike occurs. But, the beyond-line-of-sight communications needed to relay in-flight instructions to those weapons are not always reliable, an area of concern for Sanders. "Trying to make [communications] work for weapons in a digital world is not going to be easy," he said. Command and control files are often large, and require "massaging" to snake through the communications pipes, he added. "The reliability that comes with comms is probably the real zinger in the bunch," he said.

Guided Tour Through Acquisition.

Acting Pentagon Acquisition czar Michael Wynne announced last week the posting of an Internet users guide for the DoD's acquisition process. The new Internet guidebook outlines the process from mission need to procurement, and an Oct. 14 Pentagon announcement says the "guidebook fulfills the department's earlier commitment to design a transformed acquisition system" that fosters efficiency and flexibility. The 5000.1 and 5000.2 rules, released in May 2002, replaced the older DoD 5000 process. The new guidebook can be accessed at: <http://akss.dau.mil/DAG/>.

The Anti-Swimmer System.

Bolstering its ability to have Maritime Domain Awareness in the nation's ports and waterways, the Coast Guard, with help from the Navy, has developed the Integrated Anti-Swimmer System, a device with sensor inputs that gives the service underwater detection capabilities. The Coast Guard was planning to

announce the new system, developed by its research and development center in Groton, Conn., this week. However, James Loy, deputy secretary of homeland security, mentioned the anti-swimmer system in a speech at a marine counter-terrorism forum last week. He says the system "has the sonar capability to discern the difference between fish and a potential hostile diver, a technology that has bolstered our underwater port security significantly," he says. The new system can be deployed on land or in the water, a Coast Guard spokeswoman tells Defense Daily.

Mine Your Own Business.

The Navy has a small investment in pursuing future mine technologies, according to a top Navy official. "We have in the budget a thing called 2010 Mine, a program for the next generation of mine capability," Rear Adm. William Landay, program executive officer for littoral and mine warfare, says. "Right now, it's at a very minimum level, part of the ongoing Navy decision." Landay also says there isn't a significant effort right now in mine development. There is focus, however, on mine maintenance activity.

Fourth Down.

The Navy says that it recently completed the Pacific Explorer IV (PACEX IV) exercise with the destroyers USS Curtis Wilbur (DDG-54) and USS John S. McCain (DDG-56). The PACEX test was the total system-wide level test of the Aegis Long-Range Surveillance and Track (LRS&T) capability that contributes to ballistic missile defense (BMD) functionality. The test also included participation with the Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) command, control and battle management component. The first set of ships slated for LRS&T modifications also include USS Paul Hamilton (DDG-60), USS Stethem (DDG-63), USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) and USS Benfold (DDG-65).

Defense Authorizers Again Quash Effort To Change Top Navy Title

Rep. Jones Still Supports Idea

By Christopher J. Castelli

Defense authorization conferees have again scuttled an attempt to change Navy Secretary Gordon England's job title to the "secretary of the Navy and Marine Corps."

House authorizers proposed making the change, but the idea was not adopted by the the defense authorization conference committee, which is co-chaired by Sen. John Warner (R-VA), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and a former Navy secretary.

Last year, authorizers dismissed the idea, but their conference report also welcomed debate on the subject and urged congressional hearings. Although House authorizers subsequently held a hearing on the topic in March, they ultimately could not persuade their Senate counterparts to back the proposal. The fiscal year 2005 defense authorization conference report, completed this month, again rejects the idea -- this time without any caveats.

Warner "supports keeping the traditional and time-honored title" for the Navy secretary, and opposed efforts to change it in the bill, said his spokesman, John Ulliyot. The provision was not included after the conferees agreed to drop it, Ulliyot noted.

Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC) is the provision's chief advocate. His spokeswoman, Kristen Quigley, said Jones still strongly believes in changing the Navy secretary's title and will continue to pursue the idea by introducing legislation in the future. The Senate side "couldn't be persuaded," this time, but "significant progress was made," she said. Jones is confident the change will be made in the next Congress, she said.

Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Michael Hagee cleverly eluded the question when asked his opinion on the proposal at the National Press Club Aug. 23.

After praising the collaboration between the Navy and Marine Corps, Hagee concluded, "And I can tell you, regardless of the title that Gordon England has, he is truly Secretary of the Navy and the Marine Corps." This turn of phrase -- which seemed to take both sides of the issue -- elicited laughter and applause in the ballroom.

National Press Club President Sheila Cherry, who was moderating the event, eschewed an opportunity to ask a follow-up question on the same subject.

"I'm going to let that one stand," she told the audience.

Defense Authorizers Mandate Annual GAO Review Of JSF Program *Requirement Extends To 2009*

By Christopher J. Castelli

Defense authorization conferees have commissioned the Government Accountability Office to annually review the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program.

Language calling for the review is included in the report that accompanies the fiscal year 2005 defense authorization bill, which has been passed by the House and Senate.

The provision requires the GAO, the investigative arm of Congress, to submit a report on the JSF program to the congressional defense committees by March 15 each year. The last report required would be due in 2009.

With each JSF report, the GAO would certify whether it received sufficient access to information to make informed judgments on the matters covered by the report. Defense authorization conferees have also directed the Pentagon and contractor Lockheed Martin to provide the GAO with whatever information is needed.

Each JSF report would examine the extent to which the program's system development and demonstration phase is meeting established goals, including performance, cost, and schedule. Each report would also include a plan that covers system development and demonstration and the transition to the production phase.

Further, each year, the GAO would estimate the likely cost of the JSF program and compare those figures with the Pentagon's most recent cost estimate for the program.

The selected acquisition report published by the Pentagon in August estimates the cost of the JSF program to be \$244.8 billion for 2,457 aircraft.

The JSF program is "doing fine," said Lt. Gen. Michael Hough, the Marine Corps' top aviation official, in a brief interview with Inside the Navy last week.

"It's on schedule, on cost," said Hough, who was the JSF program director from May 1999 to December 2001. "It's in good shape."

Last week, sister publication Inside the Air Force reported some JSF schedule changes would be reviewed by top Pentagon officials.

The F-35 JSF is intended to replace F/A-18s in the Navy, AV-8Bs and F/A-18C/D aircraft in the Marine Corps, F-16s and A-10s in the Air Force and Sea Harriers in the Royal Navy. Three variants are being developed: a short-takeoff-and-landing version (STOVL) primarily for the Marine Corps, a carrier version for the Navy and a conventional-takeoff version for the Air Force. The Air Force also has an interest in buying hundreds of STOVL JSFs.

Admiral: LSC-X And HSV Ships Serve To Validate LCS Concepts

By Lorenzo Cortes

The Navy is currently using the Swift high-speed vessel (HSV) to help validate certain elements of the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) program and will also use the future Littoral Support Craft-Experimental (LSC-X) to further validate concepts, according to a top service official.

“We use HSV, the Swift, as one of our key platforms because it has many of the features that we need, that LCS is going to bring,” Rear Adm. William Landay, program executive officer (PEO) for littoral and mine warfare, said last week during a forum at the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C. “The big mission bay for example, [makes it] relatively easy to bring things on and off.”

The United States is leasing two HSV ships, the Joint Venture (HSV-X1) and the Swift (HSV-2), from an industry team consisting of Australian contractor Incat and U.S. firm Bollinger Shipyards. Multiple services are testing the two ships for a variety of tasks that include lift and mine-countermeasures missions. The Joint Venture is presently at Incat’s shipyard in Hobart, Australia, for its annual dry-docking and maintenance activity (Defense Daily, Oct. 6).

Teams led by Lockheed Martin [LMT] and General Dynamics [GD] are designing separate Flight 0 iterations of the ship. LCS has three

core missions--counter-mine warfare, surface warfare and anti-submarine warfare. Landay explained that pieces of the mine warfare suite were tested on the Swift. “So we’ve brought battlespace preparation autonomous underwater vehicles, one our mission systems that we’re bringing on the mine warfare package,” he said.

The major step forward for validating LCS concepts will come about when the Navy receives LSC-X. For experimental purposes, House and Senate conferees working on the FY ’05 Defense Authorization Bill also authorized \$11.1 million for the Navy to complete construction of LSC-X. The Office of Naval Research (ONR) would manage LSC-X.

“Designed to carry a variety of mission modules, LSC-X will serve as a test bed for new technologies and operational capabilities that might be chosen for LCS,” the conferees said in their report. “The builder expects to deliver the ship to the Navy in February 2005 for sea trials, mission module demonstrations and other follow-on evaluations” (Defense Daily, Oct. 12).

“I think we’ll probably end up doing a lot off of X-craft because HSV tends to get used for a lot of missions, only some of which are LCS experimentation,” Landay said. “The X-craft I think will tend to be used more for LCS experimentation, and we’ll have more things going on.”

As Real As It Gets

Bridge Simulator Puts Mids At The Virtual Helm

By Christopher Munsey

Count Midshipman 3rd Class Clay Johnson, 19, as a believer in the effectiveness of the newly installed navigation simulator trainer at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md.

During a recent Naval Navigation 204 class, Johnson stood watch at the helm and lee helm of the full-bridge simulator, with two fellow mids comprising the bridge control party.

Johnson's job during the session was to "steer" the ship - in this case, a destroyer - and to control the throttles as the ship approached the channel to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. But a strong wind was blowing, kicking up big swells and setting the destroyer off course.

As Johnson struggled to keep the ship on track inbound to the harbor, an outbound aircraft carrier loomed down the channel, passing to port just a few hundred feet away.

It was only a simulation, but Johnson said it felt real enough.

"There's a heavy sea state, and I'm trying to steer in a straight line, and in the back of your head, you're thinking, This is a simulator, but you also don't want to screw it up," he said.

Standing in the simulator, Johnson said he felt his body reacting to the "motion" of the ship, even though the motion was just a visual illusion.

"Once you get started, the screen's so big it actually feels like you're rocking back and forth," he said.

In the simulator, two midshipmen take the positions of helm, lee helm and radar operator, while a third acts as conning officer. The mid playing the role of conning officer gives the commands on course and speed. The radar screen shows the location of nearby ships, boats and land as the ship proceeds toward the harbor.

"The ship reacts to whatever the mids tell it to do, in relation to the sea state," said Lt. Kurt Sellerberg, simulations officer for the Department of Seamanship and Navigation.

The bridge is built into a small, gray-walled enclosure in a cave-dark room in the basement of Luce Hall. Several feet in front of the bridge, a massive computer animation screen curves around 180 degrees. Looking out from the "windows" of the bridge, all a participant sees is the artificial

world created by the computer animation. The simulation includes sound, with the rumbling of the ship's machinery and the murmuring of wind and water on the hull completing the illusion of actually being aboard a ship at sea.

The setup can be configured to teach midshipmen the handling characteristics of ships ranging in size from a yard patrol boat to an aircraft carrier.

The Navy also operates V2 simulators in Yokosuka and Sasebo, Japan, said Lt. Jon Spiers, A Navy spokesman at the Pentagon.

Current plans call for placing more V2s throughout the Navy's fleet concentration areas, Spiers said, as part of a larger effort to field more navigation trainers, both ashore and on ships, and to train sailors in a "realistic and economical manner."

Johnson liked the animators' attention to detail, such as the screeching whirl of seagulls circling a nearby fishing boat. "They didn't have to put that in, but putting it in made it that much more realistic," he said.

Johnson's instructor in the advanced navigation class is Lt. Cmdr. Guylherme Azevedo of the Brazilian navy, an exchange instructor. During simulator training, Azevedo said he listens for proper commands and responses from the mids to make sure they know their roles as bridge watch standers.

"When you act as a team, they see a reason to learn these things," Azevedo said. Academy officials installed two V2s earlier this year in the first floor of Luce Hall. Six smaller simulators, called V1s, run on regular-sized computer monitors. All told, mid-shipmen should get about eight to 10 hours in the simulators, Sellerberg said.

Mids joining the surface warfare officer and submarine community will probably get six more hours worth of simulator time during senior year, he said.

Putting the mids under consequence-free stress is precisely the point of the simulators, Sellerberg said. "If they do run the ship aground, they're not hurting anybody," he said. "You really give them the feeling like they're controlling it."

USS Abraham Lincoln Heads Back To Sea

By Mike Barber

NAVAL STATION EVERETT -- Sabrina, Kimberly and Brook Noffsinger pushed on through the predawn mist and dim yellow lights, past security sailors in camouflage uniforms, past stacked rows of 8-foot-high empty pallets, forklifts and crane trucks, toward the loud hum of activity coming from inside a leviathan ship moored 100 yards ahead.

Kimberly, pushing 1-year-old granddaughter Brook in a stroller, kept pace with Sabrina, her daughter-in-law, as they walked the dock, stopping midway before the starboard side of a looming Navy aircraft carrier. A giant number 72 shone from the warship's superstructure, framed by lights as though it were Christmas.

It was a proud but unhappy trip that the Noffsingers and about 40 other Navy family members with loved ones among the 3,300 sailors at work inside the USS Abraham Lincoln made yesterday morning. There were no bands or flags or crowd fanfare as there was when the ship returned in May 2003 from the war in Iraq. President Bush had chosen the Lincoln's deck to land on as it sailed home, to proclaim to the world beneath a banner saying "Mission Accomplished" an end to major combat operations in Iraq.

The Noffsingers gazed up at the ship as loading crews finished their tasks shortly before dawn. They wishfully scanned silhouettes of sailors through the giant open bay doors and the darker decks above. They were looking for the slightest shred of recognition of the man they love, Scott Noffsinger, a 20-year-old air crewman whose job is to work the flight deck, catapulting and landing the carrier's warplanes safely.

"You never get used to it," Sabrina Noffsinger said, of seeing so many venture to sea and unknown circumstances. "It's so hard -- we've been crying for five days straight. You just hope it won't be a 10-month deployment like the last time."

"With everything going on in the world, who knows?" said Kimberly Noffsinger, who traveled from the family's Houghton, Mich., hometown to be here. "You worry about (the

sailors') frame of mind, and with the unstable way the world is today, you don't know."

Based in Everett, the Lincoln headed to sea yesterday morning on its first deployment since that record-setting, 10-month mission ended in May 2003. The long mission developed after the carrier was diverted to Iraq while coming home on New Year's Eve 2002 from a routine six-month deployment.

This time, however, the Lincoln is slated to be at sea for four months in the western Pacific. The mission is part of the Pentagon's new "emergency surge response" plan to return and deploy carriers in shorter turnaround time, so more can be kept at sea. The Lincoln will stop in San Diego to pick up its aircrew, bringing its full complement to nearly 5,000, before sailing for Pearl Harbor and the western Pacific.

A few family members recalled how time has given irony to President Bush's flight to the carrier in May 2003. Some believe Bush's trip a wonderful, supportive gesture, others a premature political prop. They preferred not to talk about it, however. This morning was theirs to remember and to hope and pray.

Seven-year-old William Jester, standing with his mom, Marina, cared more about one person aboard that ship than anything else. His dad, electronics technician Richard Jester, 45, was somewhere up in that superstructure helping run the ship's important radar system.

William beamed at mention of his dad, his eyes saddening only when thinking of his and his dad's sacrifice. "He will miss my birthday, Christmas, Thanksgiving," William said.

He was happy, though, that his dad spent his last day home Thursday with William playing soccer.

To see the Lincoln off, William got up at 3 a.m. and missed school. "It's a special day," he said. At night when he goes to bed, William and his mom talk about his dad's job, why he does it, and when he'll be home.

"We understand if they are deployed longer," Marina Jester, 42, a veteran of many deployments, said. "They take care of us and we take care of them. We don't want them to worry."

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Standing alone nearby, a 29-year-old Navy wife quietly ventured to the dock knowing there was little chance she'd see her husband, a 34-year-old military security officer somewhere onboard. It was comforting to have the hope, even to be nearby.

She called in sick to work to be there. She consented to talk if her name was not used; heartsick might not be an excuse her employer would accept.

"No family, no children, just me alone," she said. "It's kind of a bittersweet thing. On the one hand, I would welcome the distraction of children because it would help the months go by. On the other, I wouldn't want to see them go through what children like that little boy do," she said, nodding toward William.

She comforted herself that this deployment is expected to be shorter than the record-setter she and her husband previously endured. But, "I'm skeptical because of what happened last time with current events the way they are. I hope they are home in four months, but they've gotta do what they've gotta do.

"I never in a million years thought I'd be a military wife, never," she added. "I'm extremely proud of him, and he knows that."

Her job as a Navy spouse is to ensure her husband doesn't worry about anything at home. "It's more difficult for him to do his job if I'm miserable," she said.

"There are things you miss," she said, "things like having dinner together, going to a

movie. When I see couples walking together, holding hands, it hits me."

Yet, she knows, "military wives have been doing this for generations. People ask me, 'How do you do it?' Well, I say, you made your choice, you do it."

She handles her sorrow her own way. "I'll go home now and cry all weekend. And then I'll be all right."

After gray skies emerged from the dawn, the Lincoln cast off at 8 a.m. Sailors in winter blue uniforms spaced evenly apart ringed its deck rails, facing outward, standing at parade-rest.

No one on land or the ship waved. On the dock, sailors saluted and small pockets of families began, spontaneously and quietly, to move with the ship, tracking it until they could go no farther at the end of the dock. They stared, some taking pictures despite the overcast morning light, as the Lincoln receded into a gray background.

The young Navy wife leaned against a stack of wooden pallets, her eyes red, then walked slowly away, stopping to peer over the waters toward Everett, the streets decorated by the still-twinkling streetlights and morning rush hour.

The Noffsinger women saw the ship grow distant, then mother and daughter-in-law fell into an embrace. In her stroller, tiny Brook, quiet all morning, began to cry.

Modified Virginia-Class Subs Eyed To Replace Ohio-Class SSBNs

Sullivan: Decisions Would Be After 2010

By Jason Ma

Decisions about replacing the Navy's Ohio-class ballistic-missile submarines are years away, but the service is considering developing a variant of the new Virginia-class attack sub with an added section for nuclear missiles to takeover the sea-based deterrence mission, according to Rear Adm. Paul F. Sullivan, commander of the Pacific Fleet's sub force.

Another option would be to build a new sub class from scratch, he told Inside the Navy in an interview Oct. 7. He did not advocate either option, but noted that modifying the Virginia-class design would take advantage of the engineering work the Navy has already paid for, including the design for the sub's modern propulsion plant. The Virginia subs also have a modular payload design, he said.

"You could think that one of the payloads might be this sort of SSBN-type arrangement," Sullivan said. Ballistic missiles subs are known as SSBNs; attack subs such as the Virginia class, Seawolf class and Los Angeles class are called SSNs.

Leveraging previous work on attack subs to build ballistic-missile subs is nothing new, Sullivan pointed out. The George Washington class of SSBNs, built in the early 1960s, was a modified version of the Skipjack class of attack subs. Inserting a section in a sub is not a new idea either. The Jimmy Carter (SSN-23) had its hull lengthened to accommodate a large-diameter ocean interface section that allows different payloads to have access to the water. In addition, vertical launch cells were added to Los Angeles-class attack subs.

Developing a Virginia-class variant with ballistic missiles "has potential," Sullivan said. "Again, we've done it before."

No formal studies are looking at modifying Virginia-class subs for the nuclear deterrence mission, but the idea has come up, Sullivan said. A decision on the SSBN replacement does not need to be made until after 2010 or so, given the 42-year service life of the current class and the time it takes for a concept to become reality, he

said. No money has been committed to the idea because the SSBN replacement is not that pressing, he added.

The long-term shipbuilding plan the Navy sent to Congress last year included a notional "SSBN(X)" program that would start buying the subs in fiscal year 2023 at the rate of one sub annually. The plan, which is subject to change, shows the program continuing at that rate until 2033.

While still far off, the eventual end of the Ohio-class SSBNs' service prompted the speculation on how to replace the them, Sullivan said. The end of the Cold War also requires an examination of what sea-based nuclear deterrence should look like in the future, he said.

"If you were going to do [a new SSBN program] today, post-Cold War, you wouldn't have a ship that had 24 missiles," he said. It would be better to put fewer missiles on each sub, but have more subs carrying missiles, he said.

The Navy would have to design a new type of ballistic missile to fit in smaller attack submarines, Sullivan said. Each Ohio-class SSBN, equipped with 24 tubes for Trident I and II missiles, is 560 feet long and 42 feet wide.

The Virginia class is smaller: 377 feet long and 34 feet wide. The Navy's Strategic Systems Programs division is looking at options for future missiles, taking into consideration various ranges, multiple warheads, and single warheads, he said.

Sullivan acknowledged that adding the nuclear deterrence mission to Virginia-class subs would increase the number that would have to be built, "but that's not a driving factor." A looming question at the Pentagon is how quickly those subs will be built, he noted. The Navy had planned to start buying two subs a year starting in FY-07, but that purchase rate has now been pushed back to FY-09. The current program of record for the Virginia class is 30 subs. Ten are under contract, and six are

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under construction, said Navy spokeswoman Lt. Pauline Pimentel.

Given the Navy's budget constraints today and in the future, modifying Virginia-class subs to carry ballistic missiles is the "most practical approach," said Norman Polmar, a naval analyst and author. But the Navy must first determine how many ballistic-missile subs would be needed and how long the existing SSBNs would last, he said.

Meanwhile, the Navy is converting four Ohio-class SSBNs into guided-missile SSGN subs. SSGNs would be packed with conventional cruise missiles, not nuclear weapons. No finished SSGN exists today, but the Navy has already designated those four subs as SSGNs.

If the nation's nuclear deterrence requirement changes, more subs could be converted, Sullivan said. Any decision on additional conversions would also depend on how the first four SSGNs perform, he added. The SSGNs could carry up to 154 cruise missiles as well as 66 special operations forces personnel for up to 90 days. The Silent Hammer experiment that took place from Oct. 4 to 14 off the coast of California looked at the ability of a

pre-conversion SSBN to serve as a command and control platform.

The SSGN will also continue to evolve into new mission areas, Sullivan said, noting that the Los Angeles-class subs perform in a different environment than the one for which they were designed. The SSGN program is envisioned with operational flexibility, and the Navy leadership is particularly interested in the sub's large payload volume, he said. Navy officials have talked about putting unmanned vehicles and special operations gear in the missile tubes too.

The Ohio (SSGN-726), the first one scheduled to emerge from conversion, could be forward based on Guam, Sullivan said. The Navy is already looking at dredging the inner harbor there to accommodate deeper-draft ships, he said. Two attack subs are forward based there now: the City of Corpus Christi (SSN-705) and the San Francisco (SSN-711). A third attack sub, the Houston (SSN-713), will be there soon. The basing of more vessels at Guam would require infrastructure investments, like facilities for training, repairs and families, he noted. Other places that could serve as a forward base for SSGNs are Diego Garcia and Sardinia, he said.

Virginia Heads South For Commissioning

Groton — The submarine Virginia departed the Naval Submarine Base on Friday enroute to Norfolk, Va., where it will be formally commissioned Saturday, the Navy said. The submarine was delivered to the Navy last week at Electric Boat.

The ceremony will begin at 11 a.m. at Pier 14 on the Norfolk Naval Station. Among those taking part in the proceeding will be the ship's sponsor, Lynda Johnson Robb, wife of former Sen. Charles S. Robb of Virginia.

The submarine will be the ninth warship to bear the state's name, including five previous ships that served in the U.S. Navy, one in the U.S. Revenue Service and two ironclads in the Confederate States Navy during the Civil War.

The submarine has already undergone extensive sea trials where most of its systems were pushed to their limits, and those involved

in the sea trials said it performed as or better than expected.

Virginia, the first Navy warship designed and built for a post-Cold War environment, is equipped with sophisticated surveillance gear and new features that will expand the submarine force's links to Special Operating Forces, considered key to the global war on terrorism.

At 377 feet long and 7,800 tons, it is larger than the predecessor 6,900-ton Los Angeles class, but smaller than the 9,150-ton Seawolf Class that immediately preceded it.

The Navy intends to build 30 Virginia-class submarines, with 10 of them under contract so far to Electric Boat and Northrop Grumman Newport News (Va.) Shipbuilding, the two yards that will co-produce the ships.

USS Texas is slated to be delivered next, at Newport News, followed by the Hawaii at EB, and North Carolina at Newport News.

Outgoing Sub Fleet Chief Lauds Flexibility

Vice Adm. Kirkland Donald Is Replaced As Atlantic Boat Commander.

By Peter Dujardin

The departing head of the Navy's Atlantic-based submarine fleet forcefully praised subs during a change-of-command ceremony Friday and said he saw nothing but a positive future for the boats.

The Pentagon is now studying its sub fleet to determine how many boats are needed in the wake of the Cold War. Any reduction from the 54 attack boats in the fleet now could lead to less work at the Northrop Grumman Newport News shipyard, one of two makers of the subs.

"I am confident in the future of the force because this country needs what nuclear submarines deliver," Vice Adm. Kirkland Donald said. "Whether it is the global war on terror; regional crises like we have had in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq; or emergence of another peer competitor in the

decades ahead, the stealth, flexibility, endurance and firepower submarines bring to the fight will integrate smoothly into the Navy team."

Donald - who led the sub force through Operation Iraqi Freedom, as well as much of the start of the new Virginia-class sub program - was recently selected to be promoted to full admiral. He will become director of the Navy's nuclear reactor program.

He was relieved of command of the Atlantic sub fleet during the ceremony at Naval Station Norfolk and replaced by Vice Adm. Charles L. Munns.

A Naval Academy graduate, Munns previously served as director of the Navy and Marine Corps Intranet. His first command assignment was the USS Richard B. Russell, a Sturgeon-class sub, from April 1990 to October 1992.

Officer In Charge Of Tomcat Squadron Relieved Of Duties

The commanding officer of an F-14 Tomcat squadron assigned to the carrier John F. Kennedy in the Persian Gulf was relieved of command Sunday.

Cmdr. Guy Maiden, who has led the "Jolly Rogers" since Sept. 1, was relieved for an undisclosed "liberty incident," said Mike Maus, deputy public affairs officer for the Atlantic Fleet Naval Air Force, headquartered in Norfolk.

The action was taken by Capt. W.R. Massey, deputy commander of Carrier Air Wing 17, aboard the Kennedy, which is based in Mayport, Fla. All of the Navy's F-14 squadrons

are based at Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia Beach.

The Navy immediately appointed Cmdr. David Landess to temporarily take command of the squadron. Landess previously served as the squadron's commanding officer and is being sent back to take charge, Maus said.

Details of the incident that led to Maiden's relief were not provided by the Navy. Maus declined to name the liberty port that was the site of the infraction.

The Navy's action brings to 11 the number of commanding officers fired this year.

Hurt Marine To Be United With Quintuplets

BETHESDA, Md. – A Marine who became the father of quintuplets just days after he was badly wounded in Iraq is recovering and will be united with his expanded family in a few weeks, his mother and doctor said yesterday.

The babies are doing well and passed their critical first 72 hours with no serious difficulties.

Marine reservist Sgt. Joshua Horton was undergoing surgery late yesterday, the latest in a series of operations to repair damage from shrapnel from an Oct. 7 explosion south of Baghdad.

As Horton arrived for treatment at the National Naval Medical Center on Monday, his wife was giving birth at a hospital in Naperville, Ill. Horton was heavily sedated at the time, and did not learn of the births until Wednesday.

He has since watched a video of the babies, said their mother, Taunacy Horton.

"He was deeply moved and reached out to touch the TV screen with his hand," she said, fighting back tears.

She said he hoped to be well enough to be at Edward Hospital when they can hold the

infants for the first time. Doctors didn't say how soon that might be.

The three girls and two boys already have their own personalities, their mother said, proudly displaying the plastic bands of all five infants around her wrist.

The babies, born at less than 2 pounds each, are in critical but stable condition. Their mother was released from the hospital yesterday.

Horton's mother, Lauchlan Jones, said she hoped Horton could be discharged within two to three weeks so he could see his new babies, his wife and their two older children.

Horton's doctor, Navy Cmdr. Phil Perdue, said the Marine will undergo more surgery, but his chances for a full recovery are good. He was wounded in the torso and right leg.

The Hortons met at the Navy hospital in 1995 when Taunacy was a corpsman at the facility and Joshua was an active duty Marine posted in the Washington area.

Joshua Horton eventually left the military and became a police officer in Aurora, Ill. He joined the Marine reserves after the Sept. 11 attacks and was shipped to Iraq last month.

Yokosuka Commander Ready To Take The Helm Of USS Chancellorsville

By Nancy Montgomery

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — After almost four years of shore duty, base commander Capt. King Dietrich has a slight case of sea fever.

“I like being on ships,” he said. “That’s why I joined the Navy — to go to sea.”

It shouldn’t be long before he’s there.

Dietrich — who attended kindergarten and his senior year of high school at Yokosuka — won’t be leaving town, exactly. Dietrich is about to become the captain of the USS Chancellorsville, one of the 7th Fleet’s guided missile cruisers.

The change will be in two steps. In January, Dietrich will head back to the United States for a few months. Taking command of the base will be Capt. Gregory Cornish, formerly the commander of Mine Countermeasures Squadron Three, based in Texas.

Dietrich will return to Yokosuka next spring and take command of the ship in June. From his tenure as base commander — akin to being mayor, but with much more power — he’ll leave behind some successes, some unfinished business and a sad executive assistant.

“We’re upset he’s leaving,” said Sai Umemura, who also serves as protocol specialist. Of the numerous commanders for whom Umemura has worked, she said in terms of temperament and competence, “he’s probably the easiest.”

That will be good news for Chancellorsville sailors. Dietrich, 47, known to base residents through his attendance at various community events and his weekly call-in TV show, tends to mean what he says, and say what he means.

Dietrich was born into a Navy family — the reason he did two tours in Yokosuka while a child — but he had planned something different for himself.

However, in his last year of college, where he majored in psychology, he had an epiphany.

“I said, ‘Gee, I need to find a job,’”

Dietrich said. “I thought I’d get in the Navy, stay three or four years. But I enjoyed it.”

So he adjusted his plan. He decided to stay in the Navy, “until it [ticks] me off,” he said. “It hasn’t yet. It’s a fun job.”

Dietrich said he’d count base beautification among the successes of his time as commander. He also has high hopes for a project he started when he arrived: an extensive remodel of the Seaside Club and its environs, now industrial and bleak but with the potential to be “the prettiest property on the base.”

His top mission, though, has been to provide services to 7th Fleet ships. “I think we’ve done a pretty good job with that,” he said.

Supporting the ships means supporting the sailors with MWR programs and other efforts to enhance quality of life, Dietrich said, in addition to making the waterfront responsive to ships’ needs without adding another layer of bureaucracy.

“I’m called a lot of things, but I’m probably not called a bureaucratic kind of guy,” Dietrich said.

He’s less pleased with the job he’s done addressing the parking shortage on base. The shortage has existed for some time; Japanese authorities are loathe to allow new parking garages because of their potential to bring even more cars and people, so it’s difficult to create new spaces. Dietrich has formed a plan to free up existing spots by taking away hundreds of designated spaces for various commands and making them open to the public or “customer,” he said.

“Time will tell whether we have any success.”

He also, despite some criticism, added one designated space some months ago. At the commissary, next to the spots for commanding officers, executive officers and the always open admiral’s spot, he made a spot for ensigns.

“It’s a joke, basically,” he said at the time. “They’re like the lowest-ranking guy and get picked on on ships quite a bit. You got to throw the ensigns a bone sometimes.”

Then he decided to up the entertainment ante and suggested a poll to decide whether the ensign spot would remain.

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“If I get more people saying they don’t like it than like it, I’ll get rid of the ensign’s spot,” he said. “But of course I control the poll.”

The ensign spot remains.

Dietrich said he enjoyed his frequent dealings with Japanese officials, and he enjoyed dealing with base residents. Sometimes, though, it was hard to keep a straight face, he said — when people complained that those who’d won a base landscaping award had used “plastic flowers,” for instance, or when a caller

complained about a transvestite using the women’s dressing room at the Navy Exchange.

On the other hand, that’s what he liked best about being base commander, he said — “the unpredictability on any given day.”

Two tours ago, Dietrich was commander of the USS Ticonderoga in Mississippi, and he’s looking forward to getting back to sea. “Yeah, I’m in command now,” he said, “but command of a ship ... I think you have a lot more autonomy and control.”

Judge Dismisses Case Involving Drugs, Group Of USS Vincennes Sailors

By Nancy Montgomery

A military judge dismissed one of several cases involving drugs and a group of USS Vincennes sailors after deciding the Vincennes' commander might not be sufficiently "neutral and detached" to preside over post-trial proceedings.

Lt. Cmdr John Maksym, Yokosuka's military judge, then sent the case to Adm. James Kelly, commander of Carrier Strike Group 5, of which the Vincennes is a part. Kelly is to decide whether to proceed again to court-martial or adjudicate the cases in some other way.

"Admiral Kelly has that under consideration," said Cmdr. John Bernard, spokesman for the Kitty Hawk strike group. "He has not made that decision known to anyone."

The case of the sailor, whose name was not released, is one of four involving a group of enlisted Vincennes sailors, reportedly including a petty officer first class. All had been charged with either use or distribution of drugs, including marijuana. The quantity or type of drugs other than marijuana, if any, was unavailable.

Whether the three other cases similarly would be referred to Kelly was unknown.

Maksym made the decision Wednesday in a hearing after reviewing e-mails written by Vincennes skipper Cmdr. Mark Englebert. The e-mails, Maksym determined, could present the appearance that Englebert "had had such extensive involvement in the case it would be best sent to a new convening authority," said Cmdr. Steve Barney, officer in charge of the base Trial Service Office.

"The judge determined that the commanding officer of the Vincennes was not sufficiently neutral and detached in these cases and therefore for the purpose of post-trial review, he believed that the CO could not be neutral and detached," the prosecutor said.

What the e-mails stated was not disclosed.

Maksym was reviewing the e-mails at the request of defense lawyers to decide whether they were relevant to the sailor's defense and therefore should be released to the defense. He decided that parts of the e-mails were relevant and released them to defense attorneys.

Englebert could not be reached for comment. But Bernard said the judge's referral did not reflect any failing on Englebert's part.

"It is not a reflection on his abilities as a commanding officer. Admiral Kelly has the utmost confidence in how he's performed as a CO in the strike group," Bernard said. "It's just another effort by the judge to make it (the legal process) as objective as possible."

Commanders walk a fine line when deciding to refer criminal charges. Although they must believe there's probable cause of guilt, they also are supposed to be detached, impartial — not personally or emotionally involved — in the case. This is in part because the commander also acts as a sort of appellate court, post-trial, where convicted sailors can ask for clemency or for their sentence to be reduced from the military court's imposed sentence.

"No CO wants to take one of his sailors and charge him with a crime. They're his crew," Bernard said. "By the same token, if he's presented with enough evidence, he has to do so. The challenge he faces of remaining as objective as possible, it's not a small challenge."

The Vincennes drug suspects first came to the attention of base prosecutors in July. There were seven; three had their cases disposed of by extra-judicial means, such as separation from the Navy. Four others were to be adjudicated in special courts-martial, in which the heaviest penalty, in addition to a bad conduct discharge, is a year in jail.



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Navy Enlisted Advancement Exams Benefiting From Additional Senior Enlisted Experience

By Senior Chief Journalist (SW/AW) Tom Updike, Naval Education and Training Professional Development and Technology Center Public Affairs
PENSACOLA, Fla -- The Navy has changed the enlisted examination development process to take advantage of the vast experience in each rating at the senior enlisted level.

Instead of one permanently assigned test writer for each rating, the Naval Education and Training Professional Development and Technology Center (NETPDTC) is hosting a group of chief petty officers for two-week temporary additional duty in Pensacola, Fla., to develop enlisted advancement exams.

"When you have one individual developing exams, my heart goes out to him or her because it is such a major undertaking," said Senior Chief Culinary Specialist (SW/AW) James Anderson. "As a group, we can better keep up with what the fleet needs to know," said the Culinary Specialist subject matter expert (SME) from the Center for Service Support in Athens, Ga.

A pilot program started early in 2004 to develop a process that would allow rating experts from the fleet to serve as exam writers. To get ready for the incoming teams, the NETPDTC staff developed training and computer systems to support the new process. The Hospital Corpsman and Utilitiesman ratings were the first to develop exams with visiting chief petty officers. By the end of the year, NETPDTC will have hosted nearly 30 ratings, to include the new Navy Diver and Explosive Ordnance Disposal job specialties, and plan to have hosted a conference for every rating in the Navy by late next summer.

NETPDTC worked with Fleet Forces Command and learning centers to get a good mix of experience from visiting exam writers.

"Everyone benefits due to the diversity of rating knowledge being represented," said Chief Culinary Specialist (SW/AW) Cesar Valencia, the Flag CPO

for Commander, Naval Surface Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet. "We have a lot of experience here, and each group brings in fresh ideas to incorporate into future exams."

After arriving in Pensacola, the visiting group will review the current bank of questions for each paygrade in their rating. This review allows rating experts to update and groom the existing bank of exam questions before writing new test items.

"Our exam bank was among the largest at 4,000 questions, and it took 60-plus hours just to review it," said Senior Chief Musician William Chizek, the exam writer from the Armed Forces School of Music in Norfolk, Va. "Our test questions needed a massive overhauling that was simply too much for one person to do."

Each of the rating groups develop a test plan and outline for future exams, write as many as 1,500 new test questions, and review all references and the online Advancement Exam Strategy Guides. The exam conferences have been very productive, but require a solid commitment by the visiting SMEs.

NETPDTC is confident that the added experience and span of knowledge brought to the exam development conferences by the visiting experts will improve future exams. Additionally, chief petty officers are learning what a difficult mission an exam writer at NETPDTC truly has.

"It has made us all realize what an incredibly difficult job our former test writers have had," said Chizek.

According to NETPDTC's Command Master Chief, Master Chief Hull Technician (SW/AW) Norman Tilton, future enlisted exam processes and administrative functions will not change.

"I'm confident we will maintain the trust and confidence with enlisted Sailors as we improve our advancement exams, just as we have for the last 55 years. These recent changes will ensure that Sailors are tested on current rating knowledge and experience as the Navy adapts to new technologies."